

Senate Committee hearing

5/3/2011

Sen. Jones I wish to thank you for the leadership you have shown in bringing this issue to forefront and also thank the members of this committee willing to hear testimony on this important issue.

Sen. Jones thank you for attending the "Bullycide Project" performance, what you witnessed were all true stories of children who suffered abuse at the hands of their classmates while adults looked the other way. You will hear both pros and cons on this issue and although there is no one in this room who would rather see this over and done with than I, I will do what some think is unthinkable and ask to stay a vote on passing such legislation as it exists now to the floor until we can deliver what our previous governor and our current governor has asked for in his own words;"Comprehensive Anti-bullying legislation".

If we look at the four bills before the House and Senate, two bills would be seen as more comprehensive than the others. There are elements that your bill and Rep. Potvin's bill lack and that Sen. Anderson's and Rep. Meadows bills contain. Our children deserve better and so does MI.

Today, it is important as it was yesterday with the defeat of America's greatest enemy that it is not only that we listen to the rejoicing of society on the turning of events..

It is just or more important that the voices of the victims and the voices of the families of the victims be heard, So we can understand the reason why we have reached this point.

I find no difference in what we discuss, and in fact studies have equated bullying with terrorism in recent years.

Year after year I have come before Senators and House members and each year I bring another family who has suffered the loss of a child. Sadly 2011 is no different in that we have lost another MI student Taylor Smith of Williamston. Losses that may have been prevented had adults saw past their own selfishness and sadly the bullying of others not to do what is right for our children, but what was best for themselves, their party or their own re-elections. Our children have suffered because of adults.

I ask you Sen. Jones to continue your leadership position on this important topic, and to rally all those on both sides of the aisle and meet the request our Governor, your party leader has called for "Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Legislation". As a person who ran his entire campaign on the "perceived characteristic" of being a "Nerd" I am sure that he understands the daily pain that some children go through. Pull people together and set a deadline of one month to revise such a comprehensive bill to meets the needs of its most important citizens: our children.

Some schools have already adopted the full text of the State Board of Education's Model Policy , yet others are still ignoring the issue and the calls for change, this is why a law is needed. Our schools

have been given 10 years to make this clear change. Last session Senators boasted of close to 70-80% of schools have policies. After 10 years we should be at 100% and it should happen by this December.

I am sitting here before you basically because people 10-15 years ago chose not to do the right thing and to address the issues of school violence in a comprehensive way, but with band-aids and it landed on my doorstep. I chose then to make a difference not for myself, not for my political party, not for any one group, but for our kids and I cannot tell you how many times people have approached me, with "my group wants", "my religion says", "my party needs". Very rarely have I heard people say here is what My child needs , here is what our children need, so I have tried to be that voice. I have not waived on my personal integrity nor my dedication to safety in all its forms and I have been routinely attacked for it.

In my years coming to the capitol and appearing outside the capitol I have done my best be respectful, I have been polite, I have given freely of my time working with agencies across this state when I was able. I have worked with schools, educators, law enforcement and parents to make people more aware of what is happening in our schools and how we can work together to change it. Much unlike my critics, who only choose to try and tear me down and misdirect attention to lesser issues, without offering much substance or to the overall debate.

This may be called "Matt's Law", but it is for every child who is now in school and for every child who will attend school in MI. It is not only in Matt's memory but also in the memory of Tempest, Alex, Kristina, Chrystal, Austin, Samantha, and Taylor and those we don't know of as well.

At the close of every conference I ask participants to "Be the Change" after I leave. Today I ask you to do the same. Stand apart from those who seem to focus on one issue and lack the vision to see the broader spectrum of the warzone our children are in and "Be the Change" and convene a special Governors committee to address this important issue and take that to the floor, and pass "comprehensive anti-bullying legislation" for MI's children.

Kevin Epling  
Father of Matt Epling